



# **Francis Marion National Forest Public Participation Strategy**

**Land and Resource Management Plan Revision**

**2012-2016**



## **Help Plan Your Forest's Future!**

**August 2013**

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# Francis Marion National Forest Plan Revision Team

## Executive Leadership



John Richard Lint, Forest Supervisor  
Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests



Orlando Sutton, District Ranger  
Francis Marion National Forest

### Not Pictured

JR “Red” Anderson, Staff Officer  
Fire, Lands and Minerals

Michelle Burnett, Staff Officer  
GIS, Planning & Public Affairs

Tony White, Staff Officer  
Safety, Heritage, Interpretation  
Recreation & Engineering

Vacant, Staff Officer  
Natural Resources

## Team Members

*Mary Morrison, Project Lead*

*John Cleaves, Contract Climate Change Specialist*

*Robbin Cooper, Landscape Architect*

*Mark Danaher, District Wildlife Biologist*

*Jennifer Dobb, TEAMS Economist*

*Henry Eichman, TEAMS Economist*

*Amy Fore, District Lands and Special Uses Program Manager*

*Bill Hansen, Contract Hydrologist*

*Larry Hayden, Contract Facilitator*

*Allan Hepworth, Fire Planner*

*Delilah Jaworski, TEAMS Social Scientist*

*Jason Jennings, Soil Scientist*

*Andy Maceyka, GIS Specialist*

*Robin Mackie, Botanist*

*Mark Garner, Wildlife Biologist*

*Bob Morgan, Heritage Program Manager*

*Jay Purnell, Silverculturist*

*Jeanne Riley, Aquatic Biologist*

*Tammy Terrell Robinson, Public Affairs Specialist*

*Emrys Treasure, Climate Change Specialist*

*Carl Trettin, Santee Experimental Forest Director*

## Contact Information

Mary Morrison, Forest Planner/Project Lead  
Plan Revision Project Lead  
4931 Broad River Road  
Columbia, SC 29212  
(803) 561. 4000

Email Comments or Questions to:

[fmplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:fmplanrevision@fs.fed.us)

Documents are Posted at:

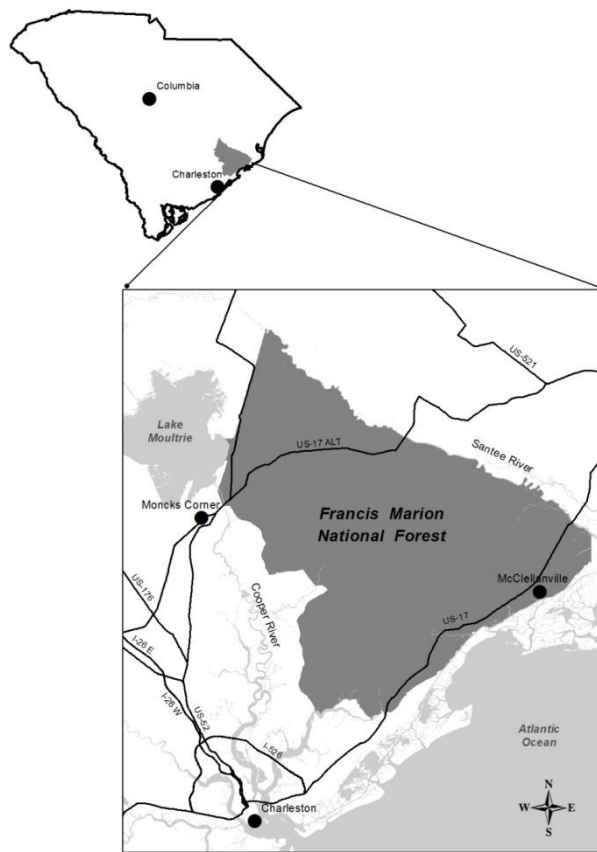
[www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan)

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## Francis Marion National Forest Overview

The Francis Marion National Forest is located within an hour drive of Charleston and is enjoyed by millions of people every year. Encompassing 259,000 acres on the Atlantic coast of South Carolina, this natural area provides a wide array of benefits including clean air and water, recreational opportunities, wildlife and plant habitat, scenic vistas, solitude, forest products such as timber and much more.



### Additional Features and Opportunities on the Francis Marion National Forest:



*Eastern Mud Turtle makes a nest on the Francis Marion National Forest. Photo by Mark Danaher*

Over one-half of the Francis Marion National forest is wetlands of various types. A wetland is a marsh, swamp, or other area of land where the soil near the surface is saturated or covered with water. They provide for unique plant communities as well as wintering and breeding habitat for many species of waterfowl, osprey and wading birds. These areas also provide foraging and nesting habitats for the endangered bald eagle and the flatwoods salamander. The northernmost established nesting population of the American swallow-tailed kite is also found. Pondberry is one of several endangered plants supported in specific wetlands.

- The fire-dependent longleaf pine ecosystem is one of the most diverse in the United States, common on the ridges and better drained areas, but may be present on some wet sites throughout the Forest.
- The Francis Marion National Forest is home to one of the largest populations of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) in the world
- Historic sites include pre-Columbian, Revolutionary War and Civil War sites.
- Many opportunities to hike, bike, canoe, ride horses or all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are on the forest.
- Open public roads provide opportunities to access areas of solitude, scenic beauty of mature bottomland hardwoods, wetlands, tidal and black water streams, wilderness, longleaf savannas and upland hardwoods including mature live oak and upland hardwoods.



*Red-cockaded Woodpecker*  
Photo by Marjtan Lammertink

## Forest Plan Overview and Its Importance

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974 (RPA) created the need to prepare and periodically revise land management plans. The National Forest Management Act of the 1976 (NFMA) requires that each national forest complete and periodically update a forest plan.

The Forest Service completed the previous **Francis Marion Land and Resource Management Plan**, more commonly known as the forest plan, in 1995. It focused on managing the Francis Marion in the wake of Hurricane Hugo, which devastated the forest in 1989. During the last 16 years, the communities surrounding the Francis Marion National Forest have grown and changed significantly. Now we face different opportunities and challenges, and we need your help.

A forest plan does not prescribe site-specific actions or projects, and the Forest Supervisor has the final authority on approving the plan. Instead, a forest plan outlines broad goals and priorities that guide local Forest Service managers on actions to take.

Forest plans:

- Provide strategic direction for forest management.
- Are not “how to” documents.
- Are streamlined; they do not contain direction addressed elsewhere.



- Maintain consistency with laws and regulations.
- Are adaptable; they are kept current and can be amended.
  - New information and monitoring validate decisions made in forest plans or highlight the need to change a forest plan
  - New laws, policies or court rulings may create a need to amend a forest plan.

The new forest plan is being developed under the **2012 forest planning rule**, which places greater emphasis on public involvement and outreach than ever before. We are committed to a public participation strategy that keeps the public in the loop and at the table. We can collaboratively work to create a vision for the future of the Francis Marion National Forest and then realize that vision together.

The Forest Service published the original forest plan in 1985 and a revised forest plan in 1996. Information on the 1996 forest plan is posted online at: [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan), then scroll down to the section labeled “Background.”

The [annual monitoring reports](http://www.fs.usda.gov/scnfs) are posted at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/scnfs>. You may also view them by clicking [here](#).

## Purpose of the Public Participation Strategy

This public participation strategy explains key concepts of forest planning and the integrated public involvement process. Specifically, this strategy describes how the public can be involved in developing a forest plan that revises current management direction and how the planning team uses public input gathered throughout the entire process. Additionally, it will outline several ways that you can participate and be involved at the level that suits your interests and needs.

We aim for our public involvement processes to accomplish the following:

- Build relationships, trust, capacity and commitment to the forest plan;
- Allow for sharing, learning and understanding between the agency and the public;
- Promote a common understanding of the planning process;
- Encourage public interaction and feedback;
- Avoid last minute surprises so the process can identify and work through issues; and
- Support development of a forest plan through an inclusive and transparent way that increases the integrity of the forest plan and adds clarity to the decision making process and the rationale for decisions.

Although we already have excellent relationships with many private landowners, local communities, agencies and other organizations on the coast, we still need and welcome more information and input as we move forward with this new, important planning effort.

## How Public Comments Facilitate the Planning Process

An important part of forest planning is the opportunity to hear different opinions. Sharing information creates a learning environment where all parties have the opportunity to understand the environment and each other. Public comments will help identify the revised plan direction and help focus priorities for future work. Public comments can also help determine where special places are and why they are important. Additionally, the public can comment on whether a place should have a special designation in the plan, such as botanical areas or historic areas. The Forest Service documents public input in a database for analysis. Meetings notes are documented, and summary reports are made available to the public on the website.

Collaboration among interested members of the public is the key component of this strategy and of the plan revision process. The public can be defined as all members of society, including employees in local, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, business, schools, churches, youth and other organizations and individuals.

We view collaboration as the process whereby people with different perspectives, expectations and opinions come together to find common understanding and common ground to share ideas, and ultimately, create a sense of ownership in the final product. In order for collaboration to be most effective, people will need to engage directly with one another through a variety of venues including small group discussions, larger public meetings or other gatherings, and possibly using interactive electronic media.

Participation of diverse stakeholders will provide a number of benefits. Such benefits include:

- Identifying or clarifying issues, conflicts, constraints, values, beliefs or expectations.
- Gathering information and seeking common understanding of facts and issues.
- Identifying gaps in information, as well as areas of common ground and disagreement.
- Increased transparency in decision making.
- Opportunities to address public interests and seek ways to lessen public conflict.
- Keeping people informed and promote collective learning.

One result we expect within the next year or so will be the development of the draft forest plan. At this early stage, you have the opportunity to be involved in developing this draft forest plan proposal, rather than simply reacting to a proposal developed by the Forest Service. In the long run, public participation will not only be part of forest planning, but also continue with opportunities for participation throughout the life of the Francis Marion Forest Plan.



## Who Should Participate?

All members of the public are invited to participate in the plan revision process. The Francis Marion National Forest is committed to ensuring that stakeholders know about and have the opportunity to participate in the plan revision process. We will reach out to a wide array of stakeholders and encourage their participation.

### **The Francis Marion National Forest will engage:**

- Any interested stakeholder
- American Indian Tribes and their representatives
- Minorities, youth and low-income individuals
- Business owners
- Local home and land owners
- Students
- Scientists
- Researchers
- Industry and nonprofit organizations
- Recreationists
- Chambers of Commerce and Departments of Tourism
- Local, state and other federal agencies
- Forest Service employees

## How Will Participation Occur?

Each level of participation is unique and important. The public will participate through a variety of ways and at various levels. The levels of participation and engagement will include:

- Collaboration
- Involvement
- Consultation
- Information

Public collaboration will be facilitated through meetings, workshops and field trips at locations throughout the planning area and will be open to the public. The meetings will be conducted by Forest Service employees, co-sponsors or by a third-party contractor. The Francis Marion National Forest will also conduct specialized meetings, as necessary, to focus on a specific topic or topics. Additionally, Forest Service employees may participate in plan revision-related meetings held by outside organizations or bodies such as county or city councils.

To ensure productive discussions, participants in public planning meetings and webinars will be asked to adhere to the following meeting participation guidelines.

### Meeting Ground Rules:

- Use common conversational courtesy – Avoid third-party conversations at the table, do not interrupt others.
- Be comfortable – Please help yourself to refreshments or take personal breaks. If you have other needs, please inform the meeting organizer.
- Honor time and share the air – Help everyone stay on track and on time, and achieve the meeting goals. Stay aware of the balance between how much other people are speaking and you are speaking.
- Be honest and candid while treating each other with respect – Help everyone to clearly understand your comment. Recognize that everyone cares about the forest, brings different experiences, expertise and insights to the conversation, and deserves respect.
- All ideas and points of view have value – All ideas have value in this setting. If you hear someone else say something that you do not agree with, that's okay. The goal is to better understand each other and better communicate.
- Avoid editorials – It will be tempting to analyze the motives of others or pass judgment on their actions. Please talk about YOUR ideas and recommendations.
- Humor is welcome – It just should not be at another person's expense.
- Think innovatively and welcome new ideas – Creative thinking and problem solving are welcome when the situation calls for it.
- Use common conversational courtesy – Avoid third-party conversations at the table, do not interrupt others.
- Be comfortable – Please help yourself to refreshments or take personal breaks. If you have other needs, please inform the meeting organizer.
- Honor time and share the air – Help everyone stay on track and on time, and achieve the meeting goals. Stay aware of the balance between how much other people are speaking and you are speaking.

## How Will the Public Be Informed?

Currently, the Francis Marion National Forest [plan revision webpage](#) serves as the primary portal through which all plan revision information is shared. People may also sign up to receive email alerts via this webpage. We will use a combination of contemporary and traditional communication methods, tools and materials to engage and receive input and information from the public. Electronic methods, including the interactive webpages on the internet or web forums, will be used to inform and receive feedback from the public. Email news and alerts are being disseminated, and the public can submit comments using the following email address [FMplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:FMplanrevision@fs.fed.us).

Printed and electronic communication material will be developed and disseminated to inform as well as to seek opinions and ideas from the public. Materials will include fact sheets, presentations, posters, maps, news stories, post cards, as well as graphics, photos and other media. In addition to comments that are submitted electronically, the Francis Marion National Forest will receive hard copy comments that are handed in during meetings or mailed.

Meeting times and locations, issuance of the draft plan and other announcements will be made via the news media, including television, newspapers, video, public service announcements, magazines and radio in eastern South Carolina. To provide tailored outreach, non-mainstream media outlets, will also receive information. Further, the agency will participate in youth events, attend meetings of other organizations, and meet with community influencers to engage those who traditionally have not participated in the forest planning process.

## Timeline and Phases of the Plan Revision Process

Three key elements of the plan revision process are:

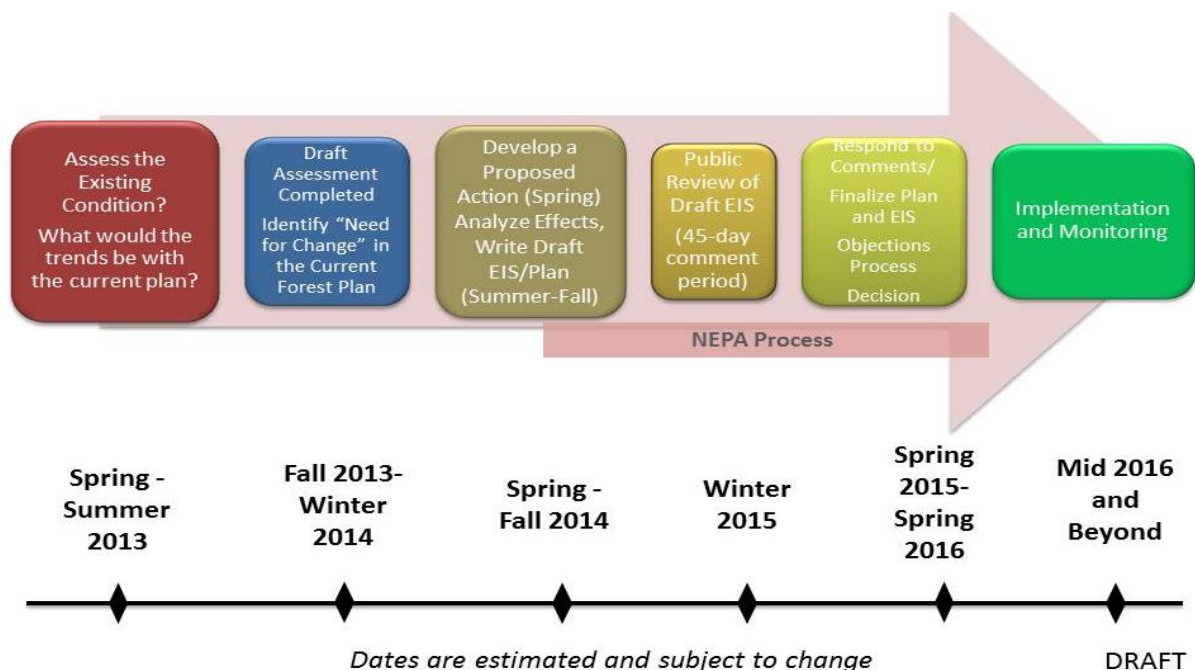
- 1) Using the best available scientific information;
- 2) Engaging with a broad spectrum of stakeholders throughout the planning process;
- 3) Addressing social and economic sustainability and ecological integrity.

Timeline for Plan Revision:

- Assessment (Phase 1) – October 2012 - Fall 2013
- Planning Period (Phase 2) – Winter 2014 – Spring 2016
- Monitoring Phase (Phase 3) –Mid 2016 and Beyond

Phase 1: Assessment	Phase 2: Planning Period	Phase 3: Monitoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect and compile data on the current state of the Forest</li> <li>Focus on the existing condition of resources</li> <li>Develop a Need to Change report based on findings in the assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to Change report identifies what changes are needed to the forest plan and identifies critical gaps in information</li> <li>Public meetings and online collaboration will take place</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft a revised forest plan</li> <li>Develop proposed actions</li> <li>Include an evaluation of alternative plans</li> <li>Draft an environmental impact statement (EIS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer a public review and comment period</li> <li>Review and respond to comments</li> <li>Adjust the revised plan and alternatives</li> <li>Adjust and finalize the environmental impact statement</li> <li>Release the final plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begins after the final plan is released</li> <li>Continues throughout the life of the new plan</li> <li>Implement monitoring plan to ensure progress is made reaching goals and objectives</li> </ul>

Engagement of the public will occur during all three phases of plan revision. This figure shows the times when we will engage the public during Phase 1 -Assessment and Phase 2 -Planning Period of the plan revision process. Find more information about the Francis Marion plan revision process and public meetings and notes online at: [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan).



The Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' supervisor will make the final decision for the revised forest plan, including, which management strategy will be adopted. We believe that some of the direction in the 1996 forest plan may still be appropriate, but interested people will have many opportunities to express their opinion on what needs to change.

## Conclusion

We are committed to implementing this strategy to ensure that area residents and interested stakeholders know about and are provided an opportunity to participate in the plan revision process. Collaboration is vital to the success of plan revision.

We will take steps to reach out to all segments of eastern South Carolina's population. At the same time, we understand that we cannot do this alone. Plan revision is a collaborative effort, and as such, we are relying on local residents and partners to help spread the word about plan revision and to encourage people to participate. The goal is to ensure that the process is inclusive and transparent. Working together, we can make sure that the revised plan considers the needs of all people and guides sustainable management of forest resources into the future. The final product must also be a plan that can be implemented. The Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests supervisor is charged with overseeing the process and approving the final forest plan.

The Francis Marion National Forest thanks its partners, sponsors, area residents and stakeholders for their involvement and dedication in this process.

Throughout the plan revision process, comments can be submitted to:

[FMplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:FMplanrevision@fs.fed.us). Hard copies of comments can be mailed to: Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, Francis Marion Plan Revision, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212.

Learn more about plan revision online at: [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/fmplan). Learn more about the Francis Marion National Forest by visiting [www.fs.usda.gov/scnfs](http://www.fs.usda.gov/scnfs).